



The Conclusion: So What?

From the desk of . . .
David Taylor
david@peakwriting.com
912.398.2987

In Conclusion

Essays of the length you will usually be writing in college need one separate paragraph of conclusion. However, most college essays are too short for a conclusion which merely summarizes the main points made earlier in the paper. Normally, only lengthy research documents mechanically restate the work's main points. Thus, this piece of advice: **Avoid repeating the thesis statement or the topic sentences** in your conclusion.

Instead, **write a few sentences (not as many as you have written in each body paragraph) that answer this question: "So what?"** In other words, what is the importance of what you've written?

If your essay has made an argument for the mandatory use of rubber gloves in your hospital work unit, your answer to "so what" could be: "AIDS is forever. It is this hospital's responsibility as well as our individual responsibility to care for patients in a way that does not put us or them at any unreasonable risk. If rubber gloves all but eliminates the risk of accidental exposure to this deadly disease, then what are we waiting for? Gloves are cheap. The price of AIDS is too high for any employee to pay."

There is no set pattern to follow, but there are techniques which you can use if concluding essays is difficult for you.

1. End with an anecdote: a brief, personal example which illustrates the thesis. If you have used an anecdote in the introduction, sometimes you can effectively return to the same story and finish it.

Topic: Many people find retirement boring and disappointing. What might an individual do to ensure more satisfying retirement years?

A final point: Two years ago, I sat in a church and listened to a funeral service for my grandmother. I was sad for her loss, of course, but not so much for her loss of life as her loss of vitality during the years after her forced retirement. In a way, she had died years before her heart failed. And now I know that those of us who are young have to prevent my grandmother's tragedy from happening over and over. For all our sakes (we, too, will be old one day), we must learn to respect and work with the elderly of America.

Note: This essay began by using the grandmother to illustrate what happens to the elderly in America after they retire.

2. End by speculating. Before you write your conclusion, ask yourself, "Now what? Why is the topic important?" Then relate the essay to a larger idea.

Topic: Does America have a hero? If so, who? If not, why not?

All in all, Sally Ride is the special kind of hero who could only exist in the late twentieth century, when America has finally granted full citizenship to women. By her example, little girls all across America now have new horizons to look to, new dreams to fulfill. If Sally can fly in space, surely they can do anything they desire.

3. Conclude with a personal speculation. That is, imagine yourself at some future point in time looking back on the issue from a different perspective. Predict how your views (or the law or social customs) will have changed in thirty years, or speculate on how the issue will look to your children or grandchildren.

Topic: What can the consumer do to curb inflation?

Thus, in thirty years I may be forced to pay ten dollars for a loaf of bread. My children might live their adult lives in cramped apartments, unable to buy a three-hundred-thousand dollar house which I could purchase for a small fraction of that price. If we do not solve the problem of growing national debt in this decade, life will be far different (and far worse) in the future.

Sample Student Conclusions

Topic: Should smoking in public places be illegal?

In sum, it seems unfair to forcibly change the everyday habits of so many people, and it seems unjustifiably harsh to turn their habit into a criminal act. I don't believe people who choose to smoke do so out of malicious intent, but given the common need of the air we breathe to sustain life itself, damage is being done, even to those who have chosen not to partake. Surely a compromise can be reached without the necessity of punishment by law. I believe people should be allowed to breathe air that is as clean as possible if they so desire. If a person chooses to smoke, he should do so in an area where the health and comfort of others will not be disturbed. After all, one person's rights, by definition, only extend to the point where they infringe on the rights of another. Every person should have the right to breathe without risk.

Topic: Explain why you would or would not want to live in a large city.

Clearly, there are huge differences between Waycross and Atlanta, from food to people to entertainment. If I had known what I was getting into when my father told me we were moving to Waycross, I believe I would have put myself up for adoption. Maybe being so far from the action kept me out of trouble during my formative years. I suppose I could ask my father what he thinks, but he is hard to get in touch with--he's always in Atlanta.